

# Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education School Year 2017-18

**DC** Office of the  
**Ombudsman**  
for Public Education



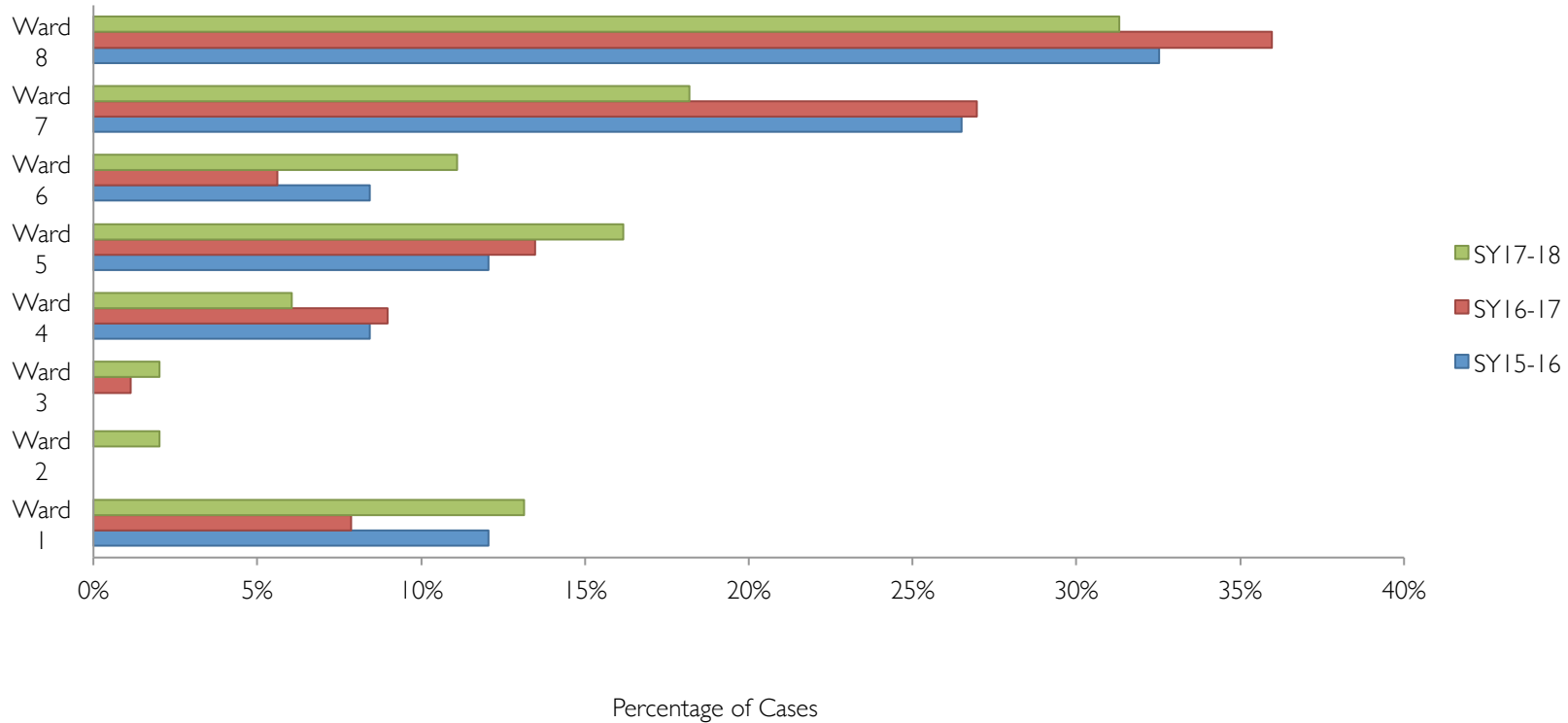
Quarter 3 Report



# Cases by ward

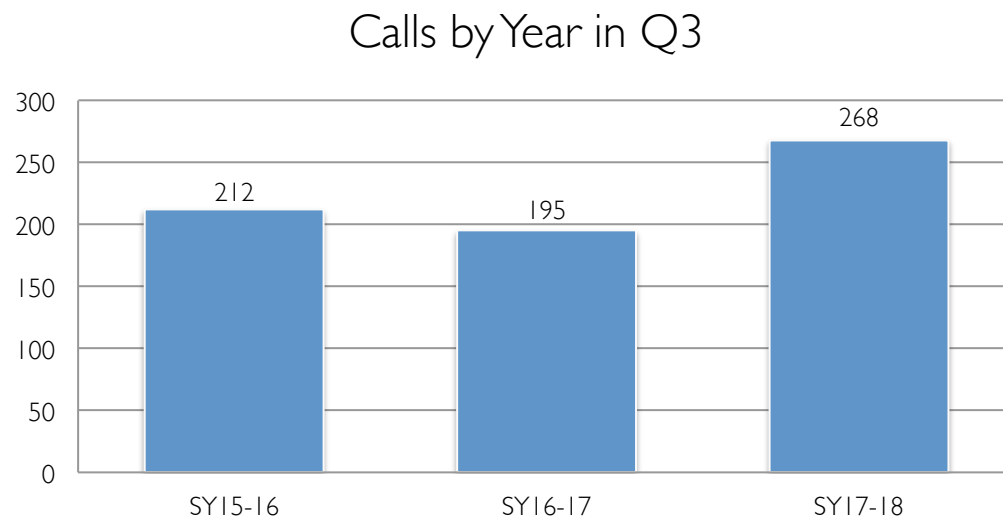
Cases by ward

Percentage of Cases by Ward in Q3



# Calls by School Year

Calls by School Year

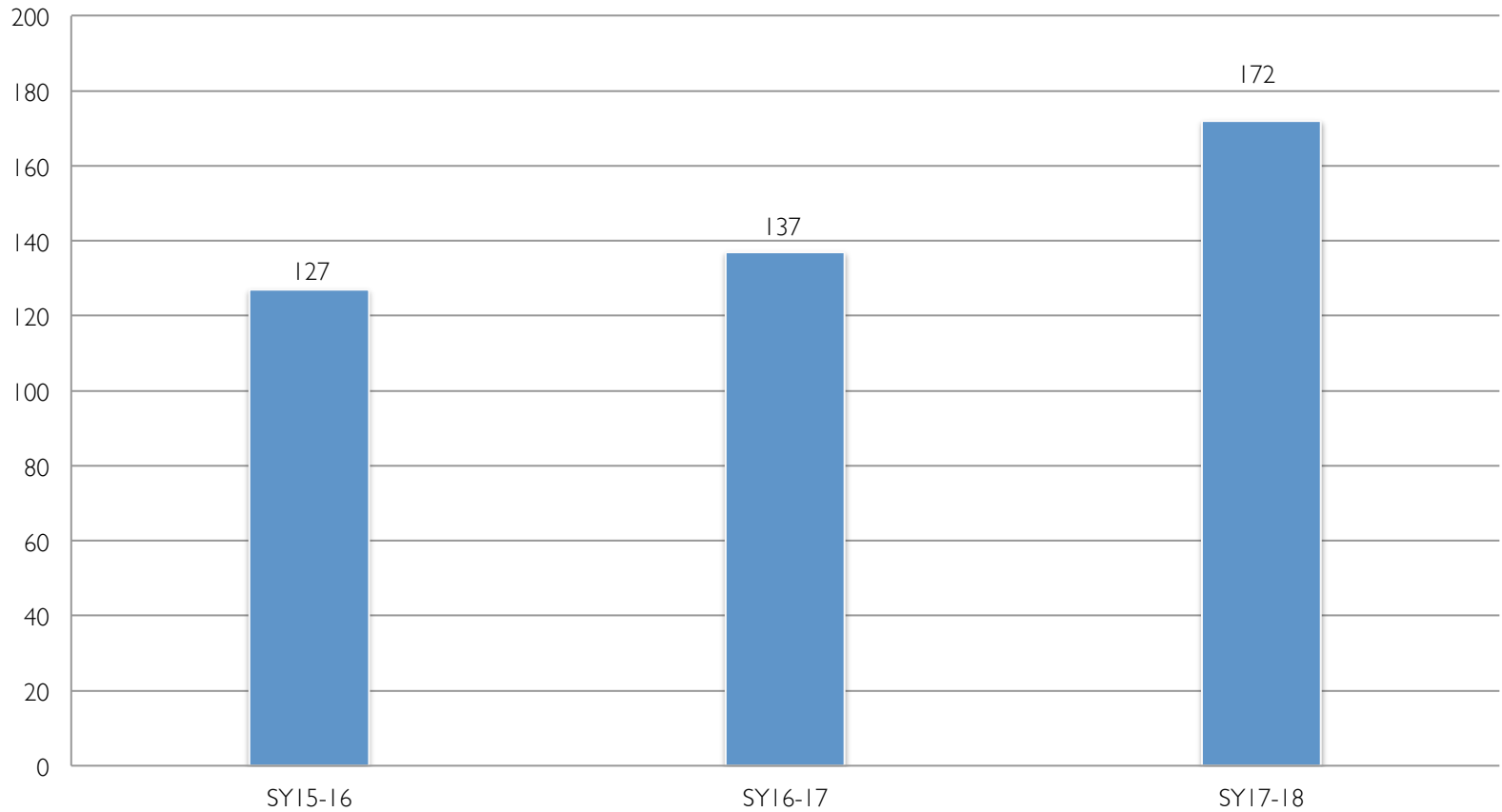


Data

# Cases worked on by School Year

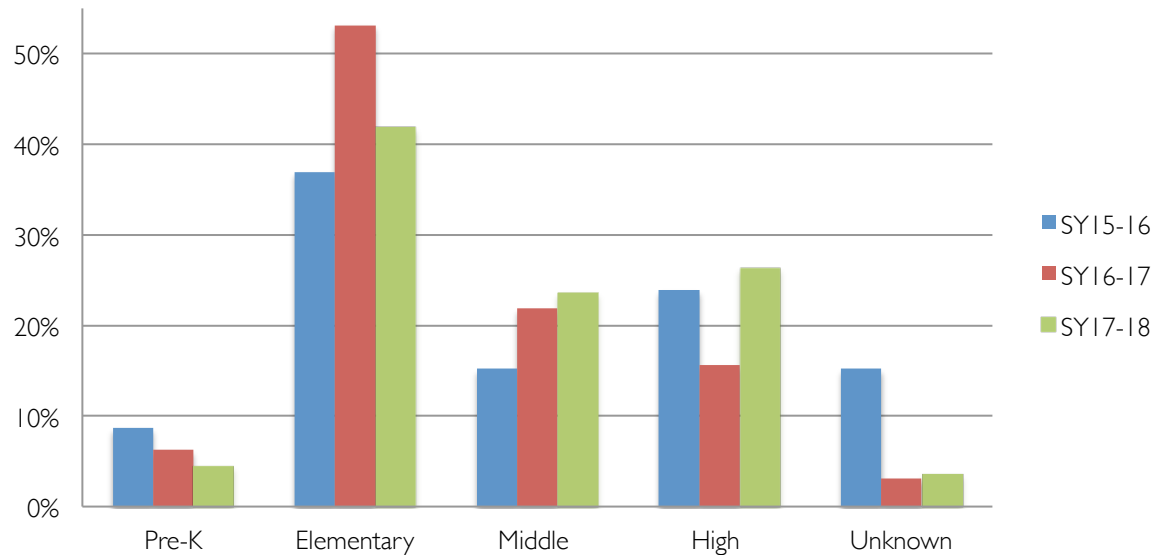
Cases worked on by School Year

Cases worked on in Q3



# Cases by Grade Band

Percentage of Cases by Grade Band in Q3



\*year-to-date

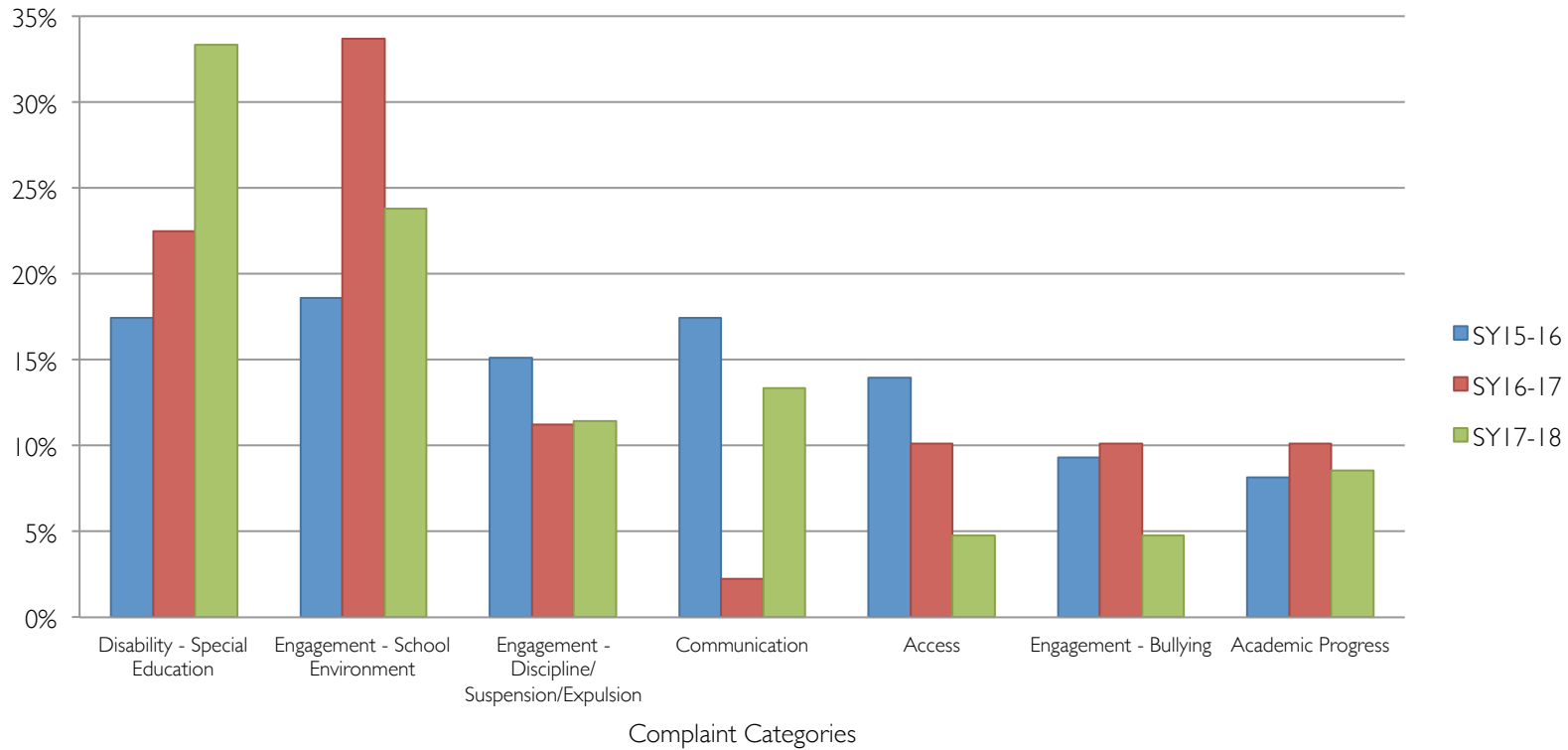
Data

5

# Top Complaints

## Job Complaints

Percentage of Cases by Category in Q3



\*year-to-date

Data

# Inconsistent Access to Transportation

- In 2014, the DC school lottery, launched with the goal of providing District students access to additional school options regardless of neighborhood.
- However, the DME, through the Safe Passage Working Group and the DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, identified that travel and safe passage remains a burden for some families.
- As a result, current policy may effectively punish some families for transportation, distance, and other extenuating circumstances outside their control.
- Though all public school students ride free in DC, there is currently no system for transporting young students, students with disabilities who do not have transportation as part of their accommodations, and students who are relatively far from the nearest transit system.
- As a result, school choice is predicated not only on the ability to secure a lottery spot in a desirable school, but also on the ability to get to school.
- DC's truancy laws and strict attendance standards, as a result, serve as additional systems-imposed barriers when coupled with the lack of quality transportation options for all students.

# Inconsistent Access to Transportation

## Inconsistent Access to Transportation

The Cross Sector Taskforce At-Risk working group recently issued recommendations to increase access to schools for at-risk students. These recommendations include adding magnet schools to underserved wards to remove the burden of traveling across the city away from at-risk students, conducting a feasibility study on city-run school buses on high density routes, and identifying burdens to school attendance. These recommendations would address the burdens identified in our casework, and would need the appropriate funding to implement.



# Inconsistent Access to Transportation

Our case examples highlight some of the transportation issues that result from an inflexible system that does not take barriers our families face into account when attempting to get to school. We highlight a few case examples below:

- Ms. Jenkins was unable to take her son, Jamar to school due to her hospitalizations and subsequent follow-up appointments. Since she was a single mother, she had no one else to take her son to school and as a result he accrued unexcused absences. Although Jamar was in pre-kindergarten and not of compulsory school age, and thus exempted from the truancy policy, Ms. Jenkins still received letters threatening a CFSA call for educational neglect.
- A grandmother, Ms. Wells, of a first grader, Will, who often watched her grandson and his younger siblings, was unable to take Will to school because she could not easily walk down stairs due to her arthritis. Because DCPS attendance policy does not have policy that addresses her situation, she was unable to take her son to school and thus Will accrued several unexcused absences.
- Ms. Rogers had difficulty transporting her two daughters, Jhane (5th grade) and Amara (1st grade) to and from school. Ms. Rogers' family is homeless and lived across town from her daughters' school, and so was concerned about her daughters needing to take multiple buses everyday to their school, but desired to keep them there since they are thriving academically and socially. The principal was empathetic, but unable to find a workaround to support the family.

# Mental Health Problems

47% of children and teens in DC have experienced at least one traumatic event, or an event involving proximate violence, incarceration of a parent, or drug abuse.

The effects of trauma on children are multifold. As we have observed with our families, children who have experienced trauma often act out in the classroom or demonstrate other antisocial behaviors. Addressing mental health issues is particularly important, because trauma impacts students' willingness to attend school, hinders academic achievement, and stifles the ability to respond appropriately in a less traumatic environment. Some of the mental health barriers we have observed this quarter include:

- A ninth grade student was retained three times and unable to attend class due to her crippling anxiety and severe emotional disturbance.
- A fourth grade student who stopped doing his classwork and homework because he became dejected from getting in trouble multiple times and being seen as the "problem child." He is now at risk for academic failure.
- A fifth grade student diagnosed with ADHD and hallucinations cannot be around a lot of people without misbehaving. He has been on a 504 plan for several years, which is no longer effective.
- A fourth grade student who has a developmental delay and speech impairment has suicidal ideation as a result of bullying, which her mom feels the school has handled dismissively.
- A third grader with autism and anxiety/mood disorder was suspended after a behavior tech took away a magnet that his teacher allowed him to take outside of the classroom. His mom feels that the situation was handled inappropriately due to his diagnoses.

# Mental Health Problems

- In the Performance Oversight Hearing from the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services, DCPS and Chairman Grosso stated that there are currently 47 DBH clinicians in DCPS schools. DBH convened a behavioral health working group” last year to expand services to all schools. DCPS is currently using “whole school model,” in which teachers screen students and refer potential concerns or evaluation/ screening needs to school social workers and psychologists.
- Additionally, the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services stated that 100% of all schools and public charter schools have 40 hours of coverage by health professionals. The Deputy Mayor hopes to expand this program to include coverage for mental health supports in both school sectors. The behavioral health working group has recommended that services first be expanded in highest need schools.
- In the 2018 Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Service’s Budget Oversight Hearing, Council Member Gray, in his opening statement said: that the behavioral health working group” for schools secured 3 million dollars to expand mental health coverage. Expansion of DBH services was expanded to the highest need schools first, as expansion to all schools was considered too ambitious in the first year.
- While we applaud the additional funding for behavioral health services in high-need schools, it is critical that these supports reach economically disadvantaged families who attend schools across the city.

Systemic Issues

# Community/Stakeholder Events

- Participated in a “fireside chat” on the state of public education at the Atlantic Education Summit convened on May 1<sup>st</sup>.
- Participated in “Advocacy is a Lifestyle: A Chat with Changemakers.” L.O.U.D. Brown Girls is an advocacy/mentoring opportunity offered through Georgetown Law School for black and brown students of color to learn advocacy skills. Last Saturday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, I was asked to join a number of other advocates to speak to the girls about my career path and ways that I practice advocacy in my profession.
- Will participate in a judicial education panel opportunity on 5/3, on a panel entitled “The Intersection of Race and the Law. The panel covered the school-to-prison pipeline and providing an update to the 60 plus judges in the D.C. Superior Court on the recent legislation, the Student Fair Access to School Act of 2017.
- Participated in the Ward 6 “Know Your Rights” Panel on Special Education with the Office of the Student Advocate. In this session we helped families with specific questions regarding special education in a world café model, in which parents and advocates spoke to each agency about how they provide support to families in special education.
- Participated in the Department of Human Services TANF Employment Program, a monthly meeting of service providers and government and community partners joining together to provide supports to community members.
- Participated in 8/9 resource fairs hosted by the Deputy Mayor for Education, the Office of the Chancellor, and District of Columbia Public Schools. The event served to inform students and families of resources available to them across the District.

# Definitions

## Definitions

### Categories

Broad definitions that signal what is the primary reason that a student is unable to access their education.

### Academic Progress

Issues preventing a student from accessing their education related to grades, credits, transcripts, and curriculum that impact learning or perception of learning.

### Access

Issues preventing a student from accessing their education unrelated to the curriculum, or due to procedural difficulties or gaps.

### Communication

Issues preventing a student from accessing their education due to real or perceived breakdowns in productive communication.

### Disability - Special Education

Issues preventing a student from accessing their education due to a student's diagnosed or suspected disability.

### Engagement - School Environment

Issues preventing a student from accessing their education due to the safety, behavior, and environment issues, or actions of students or staff against the student that signal a need for intervention or support from the school. This category also includes bullying and corporal punishment:

**Bullying:** School Environment issues in which a member of the school community is bullying a student. This includes the legal definition, a family member's impressions, and sexual assault.

# Definitions

## DEFINITIONS

### Medical

Issues preventing a student from accessing their education due to medical, mental, or physical illness that signal a need for intervention or support from the school.

### Discipline - Expulsion/Suspension

Issues regarding a student who has been temporarily or permanently placed out of school due to a behavior or disciplinary infraction

### Other

Issues preventing a student from accessing their education due to issues unrelated to any of the other issues.

### Contributing Factors

Observed barriers that hinder access to learning. Issues may stem from a lack of understanding, improper school implementation, or insufficient school training in supporting students. Contributing factors also provide more specificity. These contributing factors allow our office to provide greater precision in communicating policy issues. This precision can better equip stakeholders to target interventions and policies around common pressure points that are often invisible at the policy level.

# Ward Level Data

Ward	Special Education	School Environment (includes Bullying, truancy, and safety)	Academic Progress	Access	Discipline	Communication	Other / Misc	Total
Ward 1	12	3	7	4	3	2	0	31
Ward 2	3	1						4
Ward 3	5	1	2			1		8
Ward 4	4	6	2	2	2	1	1	21
Ward 5	21	16	4	6	5	4	2	60
Ward 6	11	14		1	1	2		29
Ward 7	17	24	5	10	9	6	1	72
Ward 8	37	38	3	9	15	8	1	110
Not Applicable	3	3				4		7
Decline to Identify	1	1				1		3
Outside DC / Unknown / No fixed Address	2	2		4		2		9
TOTAL	116	109	23	36	35	30	5	354